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# THE WILL OF THE GERMAN THEATRE

By Huntly Carter

In an article that I contributed to an earlier number of "Drama" I offered facts and figures showing that the English public had been manifesting a deep and widespread interest in serious dramatic matters in more ways than one. I wrote, however, of what happened chiefly before the war. There was little to be said about wartime manifestations. The public went into khaki, so to speak, and took a keen interest in dramatic matters for war's sake, and that is all. I considered the evidence I had got together and concluded, not unreasonably, that the pre-war movement towards a popular theatre was certainly justified. And I wondered how long we would have to wait before such a theatre came into existence. That is, before the whole people, and not this or that section, became sufficiently dramatised or theatricalised, or both, to throw the idea with which they are perhaps unconsciously experimenting in thought into an institution that shall form the emotional apex of their passionate dramatic experience. Since then I have visited Germany, Bohemia, Austria, Hungary, and other countries, and I have gathered very many facts of the really wonderful wartime outcome of the perfection of popular theatrical organisation in some of these countries, particularly Germany and the Germanised ones.

To-day, looking at the theatrical situation in England and comparing it with that in Germany, I must confess that although I retain my opinion that there has been an unexampled awakening of dramatic consciousness in England during the last twenty years, I think that at this moment we have less to show for it than ever. In England there appears to be no popular theatre at all. I mean popular in the German meaning of a theatrical institution expressing the common dramatic Will of the People. In London the latest attempts to found what is rather vaguely called a People's theatre is confined to serious entertainments given in Drill and Town Halls. What is the difference in Germany?

One of the first places I visited during my stay in Berlin was the magnificent Volks-

bühne. I will not stop to paeanise the amazing architectural features of this theatre of the Will of the People. All I will say here is that the theatre is the work of Oskar Kaufmann and embodies the fine principles that were applied to German architecture just before the war began. The night I went its rich, warm, mahogany interior was packed from floor to ceiling with a quietly enthusiastic audience. This kind of audience that manifested its intense enthusiasm by its demeanour as well as by the very large extent of its patronage, I met everywhere. A specially interesting performance of Kleist's "Käthchen von Heilbronn" was given. It will be remembered that this piece is the companion picture to "Penthesilia." Both pieces are very popular with German audiences. I was anxious to see it for two reasons. In the first place I knew that its cinematographic form of 14 pictures (bilden) through which Käthchen walks in her sleep, as it were, in quest of the lover she has seen in a dream, is one that the younger German dramatists are following. Georg Kaiser's "Von Morgens bis Mitternachts" in seven pictures is one example. An English version by Mr. Ashley Dukes is published by Hendersons, Charing Cross Road. Wedekind's "Frantziska" in eight pictures is another. I think August Stramm's "Geschehen" is a third. A feature of the Kaiser and Stramm plays is that the characters are unnamed. Then I wished to see to what extent the simplified staging of this play contributes to the present anti-decorative movement which promises to banish decoration altogether from the stage in favour of bare walls and floor as the only accompaniments needed by significant acting. I found that the scenery consisted of a grey stationary frame and some grey movable blocks that served to suggest interiors and exteriors, and a round horizon that seemed so far off that I found myself entering into erudite calculations as to how long it would take a Zeppelin to travel from the footlights to the backcloth.

In an admirably got up publication that they sell you at this theatre for five marks (or rather did before the Valutazusclag

came into fashion to put a 300 p.c. tax on books) is contained the full story of the Volksbühne movement dating from 1890, together with facts concerning the theatre, its inception, construction, opening and successful career both before the war and during the very difficult period covered by the war and the Revolution, when for a time it was taken over by the indefatigable Max Reinhardt and worked by him in conjunction with the Deutsches and Kammerspielhaus theatres. Altogether it is an inspiring story and enables one to see how deeply founded is this movement in the very life of the German people, who, as a consequence, have made it possible to raise to the highest elevation of what I might term social beauty a temple of theatrical grace and peace. This temple is to be found everywhere, and it stands as an antithesis to Teutonic military and political assertion and aggressiveness. It has more than one form. A specially fascinating form is perhaps that called the Volksbühne. But in the State theatre, or House of the Gods, we have the same German passionate worship of the highest and best in drama which the People's societies reveal in their House of the People. Thus the aims of the very noble Burgtheater at Vienna, which I visited in turn, are practically the same as those of the Berlin Volkstheater. Everything therein is raised to the same elevation by serious intention and achievement and the playceremony becomes incarnated with religious emotion. In short, these theatres are a frozen mood and their mood-transcription, if I may put it this way, is perfect.

What is this powerful and charming mood? The introduction to the Volksbühne book tells us. From this source one learns that the Theatre has arisen everywhere in response to the common need of elevation experienced by communities and peoples. It sprang from very simple beginnings, from a Trinity of Poet, player and playgoer—One in Three, Three in One. As these became separated by deputising, so the Theatre lost its vitality and true function. To regain these they must be reunited in the Theatre till the Theatre once more represents the Organised Will of the People expressed through all the visible objects and agents of interpretation and representation. This briefly and roughly is

the formative ideal explained by the introduction as underlying the Volksbühne. It means that the true Theatre is the natural outcome of the dramatic desire of the common soul of the People, its ritual is the unfolding of that soul, it breathes the very spirit of enlightenment and elevation, and it was worshipped long before the Teutonic people were born, and adopted as an incarnation of the common Will to Dramatise.

The Theatre—why set up endless confusion by calling it this or that Theatre when it is, after all, as in Germany, everyman's Theatre, just as the Church is everyman's Church—is then regarded in Germany as the spiritual Mecca, the true expression of human experience in the unfolding towards individual and social perfectibility. There, it is the Organised Will of the People. At one time I was rather fascinated by the subject of the Organised Will of the Theatre. I remember I wrote an introduction to my book on Max Reinhardt. It consisted of a 50 page solid explanation of my theory. It so charmed the publisher that he promptly cut it out. He said he did not want all the conscientious young reviewers to emigrate. This nearly broke my heart. And when he saw my tears he opened his publisher-heart and admitted a skeleton of my theory. The Will I had in mind was that of a collective body of men of the theatre each member of which was to organise a group of co-operators in his own department, and all were to form a group of groups. The larger and German way is to invite the public to form groups. Each group appoints its own executive and thereby co-operates immediately in the direction and control of the policy of its place of entertainment. Hence the exercise of the Will of all concerned. The practical aim of the joint control is to provide just that class of entertainment and to afford just that protection to its own entertainers which the organised Will demands for uplifting purposes.

Without appearing to glorify Germany or its wonderful Theatre at the expense of our attempts to establish a popular Theatre, it may be said that such a Theatre will never be established in this country till we recognise and understand this particular ideal and proceed to work towards it in a practical way. As a first step let us

try to understand the difference in the theatrical motive that actuates Germany and England.

In the first place Germany has a clear vision of the true constructive basis of the Theatre. It sees that the Theatre is primarily an institution that presents certain human experiences through a threefold medium which retains throughout genuine human attributes. This medium is the poet, player and playgoer working in unison, that is, as one. England has no such constructive vision. Otherwise it would not tolerate the presentation of dramatic experience through a medium that has no unity and no human attributes, that is, through three separate unrelated entities. Secondly, Germany has a clear constructive policy based upon its vision. Its policy is to build with the materials provided by the said three unified and harmonious elements, thus using the wholehearted enthusiasm of the poet, the player and the playgoer to begin and complete the edifice.

Again, England has no such complete constructive policy. It is true that a very promising constructive policy has been suggested by the Actors' Association according to which the player is to undertake the building and management of the Theatre and the acceptance of all its wonders. Thus one at least of the fundamental elements of the Theatre is introduced. Perhaps there are two, if the player is to include the poet in some new form of entertainment about to be invented. But only in Germany does there seem a clear idea of executive organisation, involving a joint administration of the said Trinity of Poet, Player and Playgoer.

The English Theatre has no executive of the kind as yet. Perhaps it is working towards one. If the dramatic emotions of the People are deeply touched, as no doubt they are, it is because the path towards true dramatic unity and from the stench and stagnation of commercial separation is open and possible. This path, like other paths of construction, needs a true guide in a practical visionary. He must be one who understands as Germany does the meaning and significance of the Will of the Theatre and how to organise it.

## THE PLYMOUTH REPERTORY

*The Olga Katzin-Hugh Miller Company has been giving a season of plays at Plymouth which represents the latest attempt to form a Repertory Theatre in that city. Mr. Alec Waugh has contributed an enthusiastic account of the enterprise to the Western Morning News, from which we print the following extract :*

Does Plymouth realise what a fine thing it possesses in its Repertory Theatre? No other provincial town in the South of England possesses one.

Their performance of "As You Like It" comes as a revelation to a Londoner, who is used to seeing Shakespeare produced either with the elaborate munificence that turns a play into a spectacle, or with the pretentiousness that degrades tragedy to chamber drama. The scenery of the Plymouth Repertory is simple but effective. There is a rustle of real leaves as Rosalind swoons in the forest, but the setting does not distract the attention from the actors. And it is the acting that makes the play. That is where the Olga Katzin-Hugh Miller Company has the pull over many repertory companies. Its acting has youth and charm and vigour. This company has life in front of it and it acts with a fine fresh confidence. It has in Hugh Miller and Maurice Colbourne two splendid examples of English manhood. They stride the stage as though they meant it. They are an ideal swashbuckling pair. And there is Miss Olga Katzin. So far, I have only seen her as Rosalind, but one has only to see her once to appreciate her charm, her beauty, and her skilful acting.

Here, indeed, is a company that fulfills the ideals of what "repertory" should be. It has charm and youth. It is not "high brow." It is versatile. It sets out to provide two and a-half hours' entertainment, and it knows that there is no better entertainment than a good play. It has chosen the best plays from all periods. There is not only Shakespeare and Goldsmith; there is Wilde and Bernard Shaw. And Plymouth may, indeed, be proud to be the first town in the south of England to welcome such a company.



THE JOURNAL OF

## THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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*Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal*

THE arrangements for the Sheffield Conference are now complete, and the programme will be found on the fourth page of the cover of the present issue. Miss Radford requests that all requests for accommodation at Sheffield should be in her hands by Wednesday, Nov. 16th. We should also be glad to know by then the names of those intending to be present. All members of the League will be welcome at the various events in the programme. But at the Conference of Affiliated Societies on the afternoon of Nov. 29th, only one accredited Delegate from each Society may vote.

An important item on the Agenda will be the new scheme for the circulation of a series of Drama League Plays. Briefly, the suggestion is that the League should take advantage of an offer made by the Shakespeare Head Press, Stratford-on-Avon, to the effect that they will print four original plays, to be selected by the League, if and when the League is able to guarantee a sale of eight hundred copies. The subscription price for the batch of four plays would be 11s. 6d. post free. After the subscription orders had

been filled, the plays would be published in the ordinary way and sold through the book-sellers at 5s. net each. It will be seen that members of the Drama League and Affiliated Societies would save on the four plays the sum of 8s. 6d., or over 40 per cent. on the published price of the batch. The scheme will only be promulgated if it is actively supported by the various societies affiliated to the League, and we shall hope to hear the views of the Conference on the whole question.

As we go to press, news comes of the judgment in the King's Bench Division on the Shakespeare for schools case. Readers of "Drama" are sufficiently familiar with the facts, and the Lord Chief Justice has not, by his judgment, attempted to decide on the general question whether the witnessing of Shakespeare's plays is or is not "Education" within the meaning of the Act. He upholds the L.C.C. auditor's advice on the technical ground that a theatre is not, of itself, a place of "educational value or interest." Furthermore, he distinguishes between the undisputed right of the L.C.C. to take their children to Westminster Abbey, the Guildhall and other such institutions in school hours, and the right to vote money for the upkeep of a theatre—for such he regards the system by which the recent Shakespeare performances were financed. The penultimate words of the judgment, as quoted in the *Times*, point the obvious course which we trust will soon be taken to place the Shakespeare for schools movement on a sound legal and financial footing: "If the Board of Education," said his Lordship, "think it right that elementary school children should attend such plays as part of their curriculum, it is easy to insert in the code words apt to cover such a course, and the subject can be brought to the notice of the public bodies concerned."

The annual Drama League Ball will be held on Jan. 5 at the Savoy Hotel. The title, this year, will be 'The Gilbert and Sullivan Ball,' and we have every reason to promise as fine a set of attractions as those which made the Beggar's Opera Ball last year the success of the season. Full particulars will be duly announced. Meanwhile, please note the date.

# THE UNIVERSITY & THE STAGE

A Letter to the Editor

DEAR SIR.—It was Mr. Norman McKinnell, I believe, who some time ago said that the stage should be made inaccessible to all but people with a course of instruction to their credit at some other recognised "School of Dramatic Art."

Now, much as I regret to have to differ from so distinguished a member of the profession as Mr. McKinnell on such a controversial point, I must confess that my own view, and that of an increasing number of people I meet, both inside the acting world, and on its fringe, is that the best interests of drama and all its attendant side-lines are by no means served by an acting profession exclusively confined to ex-members of "Dramatic Schools."

To many of us the course of education provided at these "Schools of Dramatic Art" is far too narrow, in that it is to all intents and purposes confined to rigidly professional subjects. I have before me a time-table of a well-known and typical "school," taken from a bundle of several at random. Let us look at it and see how it illustrates my point.

Its classes comprise: Rehearsal Class, Physical Training, Dancing, Gesture, Fencing, Voice-training, and Elocution. From such a course as that there is absolutely nothing to be gained in the way of general education; it gives a purely professional one. There is nothing in a course like this to instil a love of good drama into the students or to teach them what is a good play and what is not. Surely, if (as we are constantly being told by the advocates of the shutting-the-profession policy to all but "dramatic students") the idea is to uplift the stage as a profession and minimise the amount of bad acting and rubbish in the way of plays which are put on to the British stage, this is hardly likely to be done by a generation of actors and actresses who have nothing to rely upon in their course of training as a guide to the qualities of plays. An actor friend of mine, who is that most strange article, a literary man as well as an actor, has an eternal burden to his life's song, that "the average actor is the most narrow-minded person on earth," whose one subject of interest and conversation outside the theatre is the "Company

scandal and gossip." And, indeed, it is hard for anyone with experience of the profession to deny this accusation. Why then should we attempt to increase this narrowing of the mentality of what should be the most broad-minded set of people in the land by a policy such as urged by those who are in some way connected with "Dramatic Schools"?

I agree that something certainly needs to be done in the way of preventing people from entering upon a stage career by way of hobby, or because they have pretty faces or the necessary influence to obtain parts. No other profession will have incompetent people because their fathers held posts before them or some equally idiotic reason, and why should the acting profession? But I think there is a much better solution than the "Dramatic School" one.

I am of the opinion that a by far more excellent way out of the difficulties could be found in an increased co-operation between the University and the Stage. In America a start has already been made on this line of progress. For instance, in Columbia University there is a Dramatic Department, and a large collection of stage models, and designs are kept as well as an informative and regular series of publications on various aspects of the theatre issued. Over here those ultra slow-moving institutions, the Universities, have already indicated possibilities, though very slight ones, I admit, in this direction, e.g., in the recognition shown to Mr. Granville-Barker by his appointment at Liverpool University, the indulgence of these "Gods of Olympus" to Mr. William Archer, in permitting him to lecture for two or three years continuously at King's College, London, and in provision of University Extension Lectures for the Central School of Special Training and Dramatic Art.

The attempt of this particular school, under its enterprising and very capable Principal, Miss Elsie Fogerty, to obtain affiliation with the University of London is a step in the right direction, and marks an epoch in the history of the Stage. If everything that was desired has not been obtained at the first try, there is no need to despair. The fact that such an austere

body as the Senate of the University of London ever deigned to consider such a proposal is a "sign of the times"; that they made provision for some more or less academic work for the school shows that there is some sympathy there, so that within the next five or six years, with constant striving, the whole scheme may be accomplished.

But I sincerely hope that when any British 'Varsity incorporates a Dramatic School into its departments, or starts a dramatic section of its own, it will stipulate a fair amount of wide general work in such subjects as English, History, etc., in its requirements. Then, perhaps, we shall be able to rear a race of actors and producers who will not make such a pathetically ludicrous mistake as Tree is said to have made when he produced King John—that of introducing a tableau of John signing *Magna Carta* with a quill pen, when every elementary school-child to-day knows that all documents were sealed.

Can anyone doubt, after the last year or so's experience of the English Stage, that a broad understanding of the psychological factors underlying the construction of a play as well as an understanding always of the meaning of the lines spoken is essential? Yet, how often do we sit and listen to a play in which lines are being spoken of which it is quite obvious the speaker does not know the meaning. A broad general education as a preliminary basis to the professional one would help to minimise this bad fault.

Many of our finest actors, and theatre people in general, have come from one or other of the 'Varsities in the first place, and yet we have talk of closing the channels leading to the Stage to such aspirants. The importance of the dramatic work done at Oxford and Cambridge in bringing forward new material for the Stage cannot be disputed, and London has now a University Society which hopes soon more than to rival those of the older sisters. Moreover, I have it on very good authority that the Senate is likely to look very favourably on the plans of the University Dramatic Society for the building of a theatre, on the latest principles, amongst the new University buildings at Bloomsbury. Good work, too, is being done up and down the country by the

Dramatic Societies of the newer Universities, and these societies invariably breed a number of aspirants to the profession. The majority of these would-be actors have not the time or the money to spend on a course of pure dramatic art after their University career is finished. It seems absurd to deny a chance to all this likely material on the score of a lack of professional training, though, on the other hand, one can see the force of the argument that they should have a certain amount of it. The solution then seems to be to get a course in dramatic work instituted as a definite branch of University activity. After all, we are content to give diplomas and degrees in such things as journalism and librarianship, and why should we not have one in the different branches of stage-craft? Then the "degree in Dramatic Art" could be made the key to the profession.

The Council of the British Drama League has shown its worth in trying to bring home to the Board of Education the need for more dramatic teaching in schools: Could it not take steps to secure a conference between say representatives of the University of London, the Actors' Association, the University of London dramatic Society, and itself, to discuss the possibilities and probabilities of the institution of a diploma in stage work at the University, and the kind of courses required?

Yours faithfully,

GILBERT HALL,  
President the University  
of London Dramatic Society.

#### BIRMINGHAM REPERTORY THEATRE.

On Saturday, November 19th, will be given the first performance in England of Calderon's "The Mayor of Zalamea." The translation used will be that of Edward Fitzgerald, and the event will be an important one in every way. Calderon's play is one of the finest examples of Spanish drama, and this revival should on no account be missed by those for whom a visit to Birmingham is in any way possible. A successful production has just been given at the Repertory Theatre of Sierra's "The Two Shepherds," translated by Mr. and Mrs. Granville-Barker.

# NEWS FROM NORTH & SOUTH

## MANCHESTER PLAYGOERS.

The annual report of this energetic society contains a fine record of work accomplished and still to be done. The following extract will be of general interest:

"It would appear that we have little to fear for the future, but we cannot help feeling some trepidation at the invasion of the cinematograph. In spite of great efforts it has not been possible to save the Gaiety from becoming a cinema, and there is every reason to believe that the Theatre Royal will meet the same fate. Next season will see us with only two theatres, the Prince's and the Opera House, probably producing mediocre plays in a mediocre manner. This will throw, more than ever, a responsibility on to the amateurs, and the indications are that the responsibility will be accepted.

So far as the Club is concerned, we have had a good season, in spite of some difficulties. The musical evenings have met with full support and will now become a feature of the syllabus. A representative team went to Sheffield and debated the Sheffield proposals on "Education and the Drama." We have had most interesting papers from Lord Dunsany, Mr. Horace Shipp, Sir Frank Benson, Mr. W. L. George, and Mr. E. A. Baughan. We have been visited by the Unnamed Society, the Poetry Society, and the British Music Society.

The *Journal* has been well received, and the new feature of dramatic criticisms met with great favour and attention. During the season twenty-six plays were noticed.

Since the last annual meeting we have had thirty-one meetings, as against twenty-seven last year."

## LANCASHIRE CATHOLIC PLAYERS.

The Lancashire Catholic Players made a great success of "Everyman" in Manchester during the last week of September; their acting undoubtedly had a quality which I have always found wanting in "Everyman," however well produced on the secular stage, for it was tinctured with a religious fervour and sincerity which these actors

probably owed to their unbroken inheritance and daily practice of the faith and tradition that gave birth to these early morality plays. The result was a presentation more living and actual and reverential than the colder and more remote abstractions of the professional stage. The team work was excellent and by a self-denying ordinance, the rest of the caste carefully subdued their acting so as to exalte the predominance of the central character. The concealed choir and orchestra, the excellent choice of music, the simple setting, the brilliantly designed costumes and the efficient rehearsals all testified to a unity of command that resulted in a most satisfying artistic ensemble. Miss Ponsford-Baker, in the long and trying title rôle, ably conveyed in action and diction the various phases of the gradual conversion of "Everyman" from the reckless libertine to the repentant sinner, eager and ready for the final summons. A certain physical exhaustion visible in the tired expression of the face and eyes of the actress materially assisted the illusion of her careful art in conveying the failure of bodily strength and the spiritual exaltation of "Everyman" as Death approached.

One adverse criticism must be repeated with regard to the accent of several of the minor characters which was definitely Lancashire and with severer tutorship might be eliminated altogether. It is more a matter for discussion how far the actors according to modern custom may ignore the rhyme and rhythm of these ancient couplets and run them into prose; actuality is gained thereby, but the sensitive ear misses the quaint archaic effect of the recurring end pauses of each line. E. S.

## THE CIVIC PLAYERS.

Many will remember the performance of one of Professor Geddes' Edinburgh "Masques of Learning" at the University of London (Imperial Institute) in 1912. One outcome of this was the formation of most of the 300 players into a body of "London Masques," soon dissolved by the war. A kindred "Masque of Land and People,"

performed by members and friends of the Civic Education League, was organised at the Guildford Summer School of Civics by Miss Gladys Mayer and Mr. Leight Henry. The success attained by this development has led to the formation, at a recent meeting at Leplay House, of a group of "Civic Players." The group will undertake, as its first task, the production of "Masque of Land and People" in London (and later, probably, in rural centres), and the preparation of a series of Masques, Pageants, and Plays of a civic character for later production is already being planned. Professor Patrick Geddes has been elected President of the new organisation, with Mr. Leigh Henry as Vice-President, and Miss Gladys Mayer as Hon. Secretary.

#### NORTH LONDON GROUP.

On Saturday, October 8th, the North London group gave an exceedingly interesting entertainment at the Northern Polytechnic. The programme consisted of a quadruple bill, comprising two of Miss Gertrude Jennings's short plays, "The Bathroom Door" and "Waiting for the 'Bus'; a dramatic episode by E. V. Barr, entitled "The Escape," dealing with the escape of a convict from Dartmoor prison, aided by his wife and a faithful friend; and "Michael," a stage adaption by Miles Malilson of "What Men Live By," by Leo Tolstoi.

In "The Bathroom Door" very good work was done by Mr. Arthur Dalroy as an irate old gentleman, Miss Kathleen Wills as a prudish old lady, Mr. Walter Traill and Miss Alice Noble as a highly strung prima donna. Miss Noble also gave a clever sketch of a Cockney "lady" in "Waiting for the 'Bus.'" Mr. Godfrey Bond, Mr. Walter Lockwood, Miss Rosemary Ede, and Miss Elsie Manley had perhaps more scope in "The Escape," and made the most of it. Miss Manley's work especially is very promising; she must learn not to move her head so much in straight work, but her Cockney study in "Waiting for the 'Bus'" was excellent. Mr. Bernard

Gott gave a most amusing sketch of an intoxicated old woman in "Waiting for the 'Bus,'" in which Mr. William Taylor, as a Policeman, Miss Rosemary Ede, Miss Helena Lamond, and Miss Ida Lockwood also did good work.

Of course, "Michael" was the *pièce de résistance* of the evening, and the company gave a very sympathetic and interesting rendering of this mystery drama, as they so aptly describe it. Excellent work was done by Mr. Godfrey Bond as Simon, the shoemaker, little Miss Doris Lockwood as his daughter Aninska, and Miss Kathleen Wills as the lady who adopts the two little orphans, ably rendered by Miss Marjorie Chapman and Miss Blanche Robbé. But certainly the best work of the play was done by Mr. Frederick Tomlin in the name-part. Though he does not speak until the last scene, and, although his lighting effects played him false, which must have hampered him severely, he struck exactly the right note, and held the audience all the time. Good work was also done by Miss Ida Lockwood as Matryona, Simon's wife, and by Mr. Walter Lockwood as the Nobleman, who, incidentally, produced the play. The costumes were designed and executed by the members of the group.

IRENE DARRELL.

#### SHEFFIELD LITTLE THEATRE.

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